

## Education Advisor Bessie Peabody wins award for helping traumatized youth in school

Bessie Peabody, one of two Education Advisors in Southern Region, received an honor in October from the Family Violence Coordinating Council of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit. The Education and Community Service award was presented to her at the Voices Against Family Violence Symposium at the Collinsville Holiday Inn. Peabody was honored for her work with children who have been traumatized by violence in the home. She was one of eight award recipients.

“School is a real litmus test for what is going on at home. School can be a safe haven or school problems can shed a light on problems at home. I try to help children find success at school, despite what may be happening in other parts of their lives,” said Peabody.

This award should come as no surprise to the many foster families, children, and case-workers who have utilized the services of the Education Advisors. Peabody had a 30-year career as an educator in the East St. Louis School district. She retired in 1998 and was contracted a year later to develop the

Southern Region’s Educational Advisor program.

“I thought it would be one year and out,” she said. “But I’m still here after six years.”

The Education Advisors’ primary responsibilities are to advocate for children in educational settings, train staff and foster parents on education issues and laws, and collaborate with DCFS and private agency staff to insure that children are receiving necessary and required educational services. According to Peabody, the most common issues she is asked to address center on suspensions or expulsions, prompt enrollment of children in school, and special education/IEP decisions.

The advisors can go to school meetings with caregivers and help them advocate for the children in their care. It can be intimidating for a parent to face a table of teaching professionals. It is particularly hard when your child is seen as the problem. The education advisors can help even out the score. They provide the parent with some professional “muscle” as well as practical experience and useful resources.



*Bessie Peabody, one of the Southern Region Education Advocates, was honored for work with abused children.*

Foster and adoptive parents are free to contact Peabody or her counterpart, Kendra Homoya in Marion, for direct consultation on education issues. She indicated that approximately 35 percent of the calls she receives come from adoptive parents who no longer have active involvement with the direct service staff. In addition to consultation, the Education Advisors are available to provide training on DCFS policy, state laws, and educational issues in general to foster parent support groups and field office staff.

Peabody can be reached at the East St. Louis regional office at 618-583-2125. Kendra Homoya can be contacted at the Marion regional office at 618-993-7134.

## Heart Gallery touches Southern Region children

In November, the Illinois Heart Gallery helped proclaim the joys of adoption through compelling photographs of children seeking families. Professional photographers volunteered their time to take gallery-quality photographs that showcased the child's unique personality and captured the hearts of the viewer. The photos then became part of a traveling exhibit designed to motivate the public to give thought to adoption.

Seven of 17 children were from Southern Region communities including Marion, Metropolis, O'Fallon and Belleville. The exhibit opened in Chicago on November 4 with a reception at Navy Pier's Children's Museum. From there, the exhibit moved to other public buildings and private galleries.

The photographers' goal was to make the photo session unique to the child and to put the child at ease with great memories from the experience. The subsequent photographs were paired with written descriptions to give adults an idea of what it might be like to be a parent to that young person. So far, two Southern region youth have started visits with prospective adoptive families.

The Illinois Heart Gallery is planning a follow-up in Southern Illinois next year. Visit the organization's web site at [www.heartgalleryofillinois.com](http://www.heartgalleryofillinois.com).

## RA Bill Peyton announces Southern Region reorganization to "unpaired" teams



Bill Peyton

I would like caregivers to know the Southern Region is reorganizing its direct service delivery system, moving from the "paired team" model to one in which child welfare workers are specialized in either placement, intact family, or investigative cases. This change has been in progress for many months and has required considerable cooperation on behalf of all the involved parties. It is not easy to restructure a system as complex as DCFS.

In the present system of paired teams, one supervisor is responsible for a team that consists of workers who either conduct child protection investigations or provide follow-up services to intact families and placement cases. Most follow-up workers have a mixed caseload of intact families (where children remain with their family of origin) and children in substitute care. After the reorganization, follow-up workers will carry only one kind of case (intact or placement) and supervisors will be responsible for only one type of worker, either investigation or follow-up.

I hope that foster parents will observe more effective interventions since the worker will be working exclusively with placement cases and their respective supervisors will be supervising a team with a specialized focus. I

hope that foster parents can assist in this transition by doing what you already do, focusing on the children in your care. Your consistent, day-to-day effort will continue to be the underpinning of this important work. Meanwhile, we will keep you informed of our progress as we solidify the new structure.

I ask that you be patient as we implement this new structure, and understand that we all need to work cooperatively to achieve our goals of reuniting children with their families or helping them achieve permanency. If you have questions, continue to work with your current caseworker and his or her supervisor.

### OUR KIDS

#### Sponsor

Bill Peyton, DCFS Southern Regional Administrator

#### Regional Reporter

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

## CAYIT teams in southern region

In July 2005 the Department implemented the Child and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT) on a statewide basis. This initiative creates full-time, regionally-based multi-disciplinary teams that are responsible for developing and ensuring that necessary services are being delivered to identified youth. This process replaced Placement Review Teams (PRT), specialized foster care determinations, Transitional/Independent Living staffings, shelter staffings, and reviews of youth with multiple moves.

Southern Region CAYITs are conducted on the following schedule: East St. Louis regional office on Mondays and Fridays, Marion area office on Tuesday, and Mt. Vernon field office on Thursday. Meetings may be held on Wednesday, depending on the number of children referred. The CAYIT Intake Coordinator is responsible for scheduling the meetings, and makes every effort to arrange them for the maximum convenience of all participants.

The core members of the CAYIT team are a Facilitator who chairs the meeting, a Reviewer, who reviews the required documents, and an Implementation Coordinator who monitors the delivery of the recommended services. Foster parents, both current and past, are typically invited to participate in these meetings, as their experience with a child provides a vital perspective.



*Lori Gray, a CAYIT Implementation Coordinator in the Southern Region, describes the new program to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council in Effingham.*

Other participants might include the child (depending on age), teachers, therapists, and other relevant DCFS specialists. The goal of the meeting is to develop a plan specific to the youth that addresses his or her needs, builds on known strengths, and accesses available and appropriate services. The team has the authority to access the services that most effectively meet the youth's needs.

The CAYIT is an opportunity for foster parents to fulfill their role as a member of the Department's professional team and insure their voice is heard when making plans for the child. If you believe a child in your care may be eligible for CAYIT intervention, please contact the caseworker.

## CSS Secret Santa program

For the past nine years Catholic Social Services (CSS) in Belleville has been sponsoring a Secret Santa Christmas gift distribution program for foster children in the Metro East area. Although the program was initially designed to serve only those children in foster care or intact families with active involvement with CSS, it quickly outgrew those modest beginnings.

According to Sue Lowry, who was a volunteer the first year, and has continued to organize the yearly effort, the response and interest in the Secret Santa soon extended to other social service agencies in the area. As recently as a few years ago, nearly 1,000 children were receiving gifts under the auspices of this program.

This year the Belleville office provided gifts for over 300 children. Other agencies, including CHASI in Belleville and the Day Star program in Cairo were also participants.

Two other CSS offices in Carbondale and Mt. Vernon also sponsored Secret Santa programs for children in foster care. Mt. Vernon provided gifts for 130 children and Carbondale served 120 children during the recent holiday season.

## Southern Region Training Calendar

### Integrated Assessment Training

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

*There are no trainings scheduled in the Marion area at this time.*

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

**ALTON** **DCFS Office**  
March 29 (Wed) 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS** **Caseyville Township Building**  
Feb. 22 (Wed) 6:30-8:30 p.m.

### Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions =  
6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

### Non-PRIDE Inservice Training

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

***What You Really Need to Know About IEPs***

**MARION** **State Office Building**  
March 14 (Tue) 6-8 p.m.

***ABCs of Substance Abuse for Foster Parents***

Date and location TBA

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

*There are no trainings scheduled in the East St. Louis area at this time.*

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

**MT. VERNON** **DCFS Office**  
March 25 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS** **DCFS Office**  
March 13 & 20 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.  
March 11 & 18 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
(Sat)

The DCFS Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the Lending Library Catalog, which can be viewed on the DCFS web site at [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs).

**For more information call:**

Marion ~ 618-536-7751

East St. Louis ~ 618-650-3213

